

**Remarks by Congresswoman Betty McCollum**  
**United Nations Association of the United States of America (UNA-USA)**  
**Board of Directors Meeting**  
**June 8, 2006**

Good afternoon. It is wonderful to be with the United Nations Association.

Thank you, Mr. McDonough, for that kind introduction and congratulations on your new leadership position with the association. I wish you much success.

As advocates for the United Nations you may not believe me, but please trust me when I say you are not on enemy territory. So, welcome to Capitol Hill.

Your advocacy for global issues and advancing the important mission of the UN is valued by me and many of my colleagues. But we do have a lot of work to do and I am very glad you are here today.

I am not an expert on the United Nations. I am an advocate for the UN and strong supporter of active U.S. engagement and leadership at the UN – including paying our dues – in full and on time. I believe in the mission and I support the tremendous work of the UN as it impacts people in every corner of the world.

I have seen the work and I admire the men and women who dedicate their lives to working for peace, security, development and human rights. These are people to be admired for their courage, their dedication and their willingness to work in the most dangerous and desperate situations confronting mankind.

Your work – as advocates, educators and opinion leaders – on behalf of important global issues and the work of the UN is vitally important – thank you. It is not easy to carry out this mission here on the Hill in what are too often hostile political conditions, but you must not be deterred. The American people need to be educated, informed and then reminded again and again about the tremendous value and benefit the UN provides our nation and our citizens.

As you know, I am from Minnesota. So let me greet all of my friends from Minnesota who are here today and a special greeting to Stu Ackman. We are very proud of Stu's service on your board and we appreciate all he does at home to advance your work.

I am very proud to represent St. Paul, Minnesota here in Congress. We are a progressive, diverse and outward looking community that welcomes immigrants and refugees as well as a constant in migration from rural Minnesota of retiring Norwegian bachelor farmers searching for a new life in the big city.

At the same time, we have a unique connection to the United Nations – we could call it a “bi-polar” connection. St. Paul is the home of a wonderful institution of higher learning, Macalester College, which claims Kofi Annan as a distinguished alumnus. Many of us are very proud to have this special connection to the Secretary General.

We are also the home of a former mayor of St. Paul who now serves in “the other body.” Minnesota’s junior senator seems to be very interested in the United Nations and has made quite a few headlines for himself with his endless investigations and hearings.

As I said, I am very proud of the Secretary General’s connection to St. Paul.

Minnesota is clearly the heartland of America – and maybe this does put us at the heart of the battle regarding the domestic political debate surrounding the UN. Which brings me to the “speech” – which some detractors will likely call the 6-6-6 speech since it was delivered on the sixth day of the six month of this century’s sixth year.

Of course, I am referring to the speech made earlier this week by Deputy Secretary General Mark Malloch Brown that has stirred controversy and has been harshly criticized by Ambassador Bolton in the news today. I’ve read the Deputy Secretary General’s speech and I would call it a brave speech, an accurate speech and a speech that reflects the sentiments of the millions of Americans who believe the United States should be a responsible super-“partner” – as well as superpower and leader of the free world.

I am sure it was shocking to Ambassador Bolton when the organization that has been his personal punching bag for so long punched back.

Mr. Malloch Brown described the information disseminated to the American public regarding the work of the UN this way, “much of the public discourse that reaches the U.S. heartland has been largely abandoned to its loudest detractors such as Rush Limbaugh and Fox News,” and may I add a certain Minnesota senator to that list. Mr. Malloch Brown is right and those of us who care about the UN and its vital role in the world need to speak up and reach out to the American people – as your organization does.

In my opinion, Mr. Malloch Brown’s speech was an honest and legitimate assessment. The world’s greatest multilateral organization is constantly being attacked and undermined by politicians in Washington for short-term political gain. I say this because there are voices in Congress who wish to dissolve the UN. There are others who wish to render it impotent. Still others wish to make the UN an extension of American power – a multilateral institution run by Washington. Others, legitimately, wish to see the UN succeed but have used excessively punitive and heavy handed approaches to achieve their policy objectives.

After sixty years, of course the United Nations needs reforming. We all agree on that.

And, no one understands that better than Secretary General Annan and Mr. Malloch Brown who have made constructive recommendations and are working to make positive changes. They have dedicated their professional lives to the UN and they – along with all of us – want to see the organization strong, effective, transparent and relevant to the tremendous challenges facing our world.

It disturbs and disappoints me greatly to hear the empty rhetoric about the UN coming from voices here in Congress. An honest and forthright policy critique is absolutely necessary – regarding the UN as well as U.S. foreign policy – here in Congress. This critique needs to be done in a constructive fashion both in Washington among policy makers and in New York among member states. Dialogue, not destruction, is the answer.

Unfortunately, raw power, confrontation and a disregard for dialogue have become the norm in Washington. Why would Congress or the administration treat the UN any differently than we treat each other? Clearly, confrontation was the intended message when the president sent our permanent representative to New York to represent the United States without the consent of the U.S. Senate. As a nation we can do better, which I believe means leading the world towards consensus based solutions, without unilateral threats or tantrums.

My tone and cynicism is harsh and for this I apologize, but I came to Washington in January 2001 – three weeks before President Bush was sworn in. I came to Washington believing we are the United Nation. By this I mean the UN is only as effective and meaningful as the members who comprise the body – especially the United States.

The U.S. is a member state. We have a permanent seat on the Security Council. We have the veto. But this superpower doesn't get to win all the time. When we are confronting the challenges of today's world – Darfur, avian influenza, Iran's nuclear program, the South Asia tsunami, Middle East peace – it should never be about winning. It should be about saving lives, preventing conflict, promoting peace, building trust, and restoring hope. We need the world. The world needs us. And, the world and the U.S. need the UN.

Politicians in Washington can bash and berate the UN but let's face it, it is coming off pretty empty to the rest of the world and the hypocrisy is now far too transparent.

At one time I believe some nine congressional committees were investigating the oil-for-food scandal. Yet, the U.S. government cannot account for \$8.8 billion in Iraq that was under the control of the Coalition Provisional Authority.

Ambassador Bolton can condemn the composition of the new UN Human Rights Council on legitimate grounds. But how does he reconcile Guantanamo Bay, Abu Ghraib and the vile practice of extraordinary rendition with the values stated in the

Universal Declaration of Human Rights? He can't, because torture and the mistreatment of prisoners are indefensible.

I admit I have been a harsh critic of the unilateral approach to foreign policy over and over again advanced by this White House. I have called the decision and deception that led our nation to war in Iraq the greatest foreign policy disaster in American history. And, as we all know, it's not even close to being over yet.

But I commend Secretary Rice for her recent leadership with the Quartet. Finally, after so much destructive unilateral decision making, Secretary Rice is effectively working multilaterally to confront Hamas and avoid a crisis in the Middle East. Her efforts and the efforts of the Quartet are to be commended and supported.

Yet only two weeks ago in the House of Representatives – we again demonstrated a shameful disdain for the UN. The House passed a punitive sanctions bill that risks fomenting a humanitarian crisis among the Palestinian people and contains language requiring mandatory withholding of U.S. contributions to the United Nations unless reforms to UN programs operating in the Palestinian Authority are certified by our president. Here again, Congress is targeting our partner in the Quartet, and sending the message that the UN, along with Hamas, is the enemy. Sadly, only 47 of us did not support this bill.

The critics, the skeptics, and the unilateralists will never be comfortable with multilateral cooperation. It is hard work that requires listening, dialogue, diplomacy, consensus building and, often times, compromise. Tragically, in this Congress the concept of compromise and working to find shared success reflects weakness rather than necessary reality. The inability to compromise is obvious and reflected in the poor quality of the legislation coming out of Congress.

Today, we have the Security Council's permanent members along with Germany engaging Iran. This isn't weakness, this is the strength of multilateral diplomacy at work and for the sake of the entire world I pray that it does work.

Let me shift focus for a moment and say that the bluster and bashing and threats of funding cuts to the UN by this Congress and the White House comes at a cost – a real human cost.

Do you think for one second that the 1.3 billion people around the world who live on a dollar a day – living in misery and fear and hopelessness care about the speech given by the Deputy Secretary General or Ambassador Bolton's outrage?

What about the 30,000 parents around the world who today watched their child die from a preventable or treatable disease?

Or, the thousands of children who today became orphans because their parent died of AIDS?

For tens of millions of people – maybe even a billion – every day is about survival. In the past year, I have traveled to Darfur, Democratic Republic of the Congo and Malawi. In each place I have met UN workers and in each place I met people struggling to survive who have a better chance of surviving because the UN was there.

Politics can save lives, there is no doubt about it. Politics – the politics of cynicism and hypocrisy and scoring cheap political points can also cost lives. Are we in Congress willing to offer our voices and our votes to invest our nation's resources in saving lives, promoting peace and building a better future for our planet's most vulnerable people?

Many are of my colleagues are, and I know this because ninety-nine of my House colleagues have co-sponsored H. Con. Res. 172, a resolution I introduced that commits the U.S. to be actively leading to help achieve the United Nation's Millennium Development Goals (MGDs).

Everything we do here in Congress is about setting priorities, making choices and investing in the future – this is why I so strongly support the MDGs. The United States – our president, this Congress and the American people – have the power to lead the fight to help to eliminate extreme poverty, to save the lives of millions of newborns, to overcome the devastating human suffering caused by AIDS. We have the power to invest in solutions that will end food insecurity, keep girls in school and promote healthy families around the world.

Right now, the U.S. is remarkable in its leadership in responding to emergencies around the globe such as the South Asia tsunami, earthquakes in Pakistan and Indonesia, and the crisis in Darfur. But, we cannot ignore the fact that more than a billion people around the world live on \$1 a day. Their daily misery is not to be discounted – they deserve the help of the world community.

The U.S., in partnership with the world community, must address emergencies as they arise, but we also need to invest much more than we are in long-term development solutions that builds human capacity and enhances human dignity among our brothers and sisters who have the least.

I am working for a world that is more secure, hopeful and peaceful. But it shouldn't be considered an act of political courage to vote to increase funding to support girls' education, keep mothers and newborns healthy or provide safe drinking water. Why are massive investments in saving lives and enhancing human dignity more controversial for Congress than spending \$7 billion every month for a war in Iraq?

It is time for Congress to look out and see the world as it really is interconnected, interdependent, and filled with a common human desire for hope, opportunity and respect – especially among those who have the least. I am committed to working to add my voice to the millions of Americans who care deeply about achieving the MDGs – because to do so reflects both our values and our national interests as Americans.

I am hopeful we are on the right track, not because of any action by Congress, but because in earlier this year in March I attended a Model UN in St. Paul which focused on the MDGs. Those hundreds of children were smart, serious and not to be stopped. Their faces reflected the faces of the world and their spirit reflected the best of America. They participated because they not only were learning about the UN – but because they want to believe in the UN. They want the UN to be successful because it will make the world they are about to inherit more successful.

Thank you for inviting me here. Thank you, all of you, for empowering a new generation of Americans to understand and believe in the value of the United Nations.

I am proud to be your ally and your supporter here in Congress.

Thank you.

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